

Is Belief 'THAT' the Same as Belief 'IN'?



John Chapter Three:

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?' Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.' Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can these things be?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.'



What Nicodemus Thinks and What Jesus Thinks

Nicodemus comes on the scene in Chapter Three of the Gospel of John and seems to be seeking the truth. He's obviously curious. He's apparently willing. And he's unfortunately afraid that his peers might see him seek God in the man of Jesus Christ. So in the middle of the night, Nicodemus comes looking for the truth and the answer to a question that he is unable to express in words: "Jesus, how can I be saved?" The answer is simple: Be born again. Nicodemus comes to Jesus believing that Jesus is sent from God; he tells us this in the beginning of the encounter. But Jesus defines salvation for Nicodemus at the end of the passage by telling him that he must move from "belief that" to "belief in" if he ever hopes to be saved. So, what exactly does that mean? What is it to believe IN Jesus, and why would God desire that for our lives?



I Want Him to Know Me

It does appear that God sees a distinction between those of us who say we are Christians, and those of us who God says are Christians! Even in Jesus'

day this was true. This scene from the Gospel of Matthew is still one of the scariest for me:



Matthew 7:17-23

"...every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So you'll recognize them by their fruit. 'Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father in heaven. On that day many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in Your name, drive out demons in Your name, and do many miracles in Your name?' Then I will announce to them, 'I never knew you! Depart from Me, you lawbreakers!'"



Works Don't Work

First of all, do you notice how Jesus begins by telling us that producing 'fruit' doesn't save us, but you can certainly tell who is saved by the 'fruit' they produce? He's pretty clear on this issue. Don't try to work your way into my presence through good deeds, but know that a true believer is known by good deeds. Does that sound confusing? Jesus sees a difference between doing stuff to earn your salvation and doing stuff because you are so happy to have been saved. Jesus cares about your motive. In a works based theology, good works are required, they are a responsibility. In a grace based theology good works are the result of the joy of our salvation, they are a response. And there's a big difference between responsibility and response.

Jesus tells all these folks who were calling themselves believers and doing a bunch of good stuff, that He didn't even know them! How can that be? These people were certainly calling themselves believers while Jesus was not. What is it that makes the difference to God? What does Jesus mean when he tells us that we've got to move from belief THAT to belief IN?

Well, I've come to understand what the difference is here, and God has helped me a little bit by moving me through a journey in law enforcement that made the difference very clear. I'd like to share some of that with you today.



The Lesson of the Vest

You, know, every patrol officer is assigned equipment before they are given the opportunity to serve the community. I've learned that belief in this equipment is in many ways similar to faith in our Lord. Let me explain. One of the first things a patrol officer puts on is his or her bullet proof vest. Now for years I've read about how great these vests can be and I've even helped conduct tests on our vests by shooting at them with a variety of rifles and handguns. See, I believe THAT these vests can stop rounds and protect me, but that's not quite the same as believing IN the vest.



Mark Walker believed that his vest could save him too, but he put his faith into action one night. He was working patrol with a partner and cruising down one of our major boulevards. He observed a driver in front of his unit weaving over the lines in the road, and he suspected that he had a drunk driver in front of him. So he initiated what he thought would be a rather routine traffic stop to examine the condition of the driver. He lit up the car and stopped it in a parking lot of a local Sav-On drug store.

He approached the driver and asked him for his license and registration. What Mark didn't know was that the driver was part of a white supremacist group. He was drunk, and on parole. This one violation for drunk driving would send him back to jail on a parole violation, and that was not something that he was willing to accept. In fact, he was more than willing to kill in order to avoid more time in state penitentiary. So when Mark asked him to provide his driver's license and registration he started to develop a plan. To make matters worse, the driver did not have a driver's license in his possession.

Now when Mark found out that this was the case, he naturally asked the driver to step from the car. The driver complied. As soon as he exited the vehicle Mark saw the tattoos and recognized that the driver was quickly developing a bad attitude, questioning Mark and yelling that he did not deserve to be stopped. Mark correctly decided to conduct a quick pat-down of the driver to make sure that he did not have any weapons. When the driver heard this request, he turned away from Mark, as if he was going to comply, but then quickly turned back toward Mark, pulling a handgun from his waistband.

I happened to be working that night on-call on the Officer Involved Shooting team. When everything was over, I got called to the scene to handle the shooting and I got a chance to talk to Mark about what happened. He told me that he was caught completely off-guard by what happened that night. The driver had a gun drawn on him before he had any time to react, and he realized (as the driver was pointing the gun at his chest) that there was no way to draw his own gun in time. In essence, Mark knew that he would have to take the first hit, even before he could draw his gun and return fire. He quickly realized that he had a choice. He could run to the rear of the driver's car and find cover behind the car as he drew his weapon, or he could simply stay put and trust that his vest would protect him as he did his best to draw his gun and return fire. He had always believed that his vest could protect him, but on this night, Mark had to decide if

he would put his trust IN the vest. And that is exactly what he did.

He told me that he pulled his weapon and tightened his stomach muscles, preparing to take the first round as he pulled his own weapon from the holster. He looked up and heard a 'click' from the driver's handgun. The driver had failed to chamber the first round in his handgun, and as a result his first shot was a failure. By the time the driver was able to chamber a round, Mark was able to defend himself with his own weapon and he is alive today to talk about it. He didn't run. He stood firm and confident. He didn't trust his own ability to escape the fire, he trusted the vest to withstand the attack. He moved from belief THAT the vest would save him to belief IN the vest. He did that by trusting the vest in a way that he had never trusted it before. He moved from intellectual belief to practical and experiential belief. And he did this in the midst of a crisis.



Do You Get It?

When was the last time you found yourself in a crisis? Did you find yourself working harder or relying on your own ability to solve the problem? Or were you patient; trusting God for a solution and searching to see how God was trying to use the crisis to shape your character and purpose? God does want to be your shield:



Psalm 18:2

"The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."

Now all of us are familiar with people who seem to revel in drama. You know what I am talking about: people who seem to seek out the crisis and wallow in it. It doesn't even have to be their own crisis; they enjoy the misery of others as well. They wring their hands and encourage the continuation of despair. It seems like life has no meaning unless there is a crisis to endure. They love it when everything seems hopeless. God understand what it is to celebrate tribulation, but God has a different idea of how we should revel in the moment. It is an opportunity to grow, to develop and to seek God's will for your life. God wants you to celebrate the dilemma and trust that he has a plan for the crisis in your life:



Romans 5:1-5

And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.



So Answer Me This

When was the last time you allowed God to cover you in a time of Crisis? When was the last time that you stood still long enough to see the plan that God has for your life? When was the last time that you celebrated a crisis as an opportunity to grow, made corrections, searched for God's will in your life and then

moved forward in a way that was powerful?



Moving from Belief THAT to Belief IN

You might believe THAT there is a God, and you might even believe THAT this God actually has a plan for your life. But to believe IN this God, you are going to have to trust Him. And God has already defined what it is to trust Him in a bad situation:

It starts when you seek His wisdom, (as discovered in His Word)

It continues when you seek His plan for your life (as discovered through study, prayer and reflection).

It ends when you turn from your own ability and rely on the sovereign power of God.



The Lesson of the Badge

There's another piece of equipment that every new recruit can't wait to wear. I can still remember the first day that our drill instructors allowed us to put on our uniforms. We had been in suits for many weeks, and it was considered to be a weighty honor to wear the badge of our agency. But it was many months before I truly understood the power of the uniform and the badge. Don't get me wrong, I always believed THAT the badge had power. That's one of the many reasons why so many young men are willing to put it on and go out into a hostile world. But one night, while working the graveyard shift, I moved from belief THAT to belief IN.



My partner and I were very young officers, just off probation, and we responded to the report of a bar fight in our beat. When we go to the bar, we had a number of hostile combatants involved in a tussle. We were able to separate the fighters and stand them up. As soon as they stood up, we realized that we were both outnumbered and outsized. And it's amazing how much courage can come in a bottle of alcohol. The combatants sized us up and quickly began to see us as yet another thing to be angry about. I weighed about 170lbs at the time, and my partner was not much bigger. These guys were huge, angry and drunk. It seemed at first like we were in a bit of trouble. But I

realized that there WAS something that differentiated us from them. My partner and I were wearing the badges. I knew I could either retreat and call for back-up or trust IN the badge to work for me. I also knew that the badge represented something bigger than my partner and I. It represented a fellowship of officers across the nation and it represented the power of truth in our culture. The badge had more power than the men who were wearing it.

So I stood there and simply commanded the men to stop fighting and turn around so they could place their hands on the wall. They paused for a second and stared at my partner and I. They measured us. You could tell that they were thinking about their next move. But they seemed to understand what we represented and they reluctantly complied. Of course, the minute they turned their back, I did call for some assistance. But throughout the search process and the eventual arrest of a couple of these guys, we had no problem. Our badges preceded us and spoke volumes before we ever said a word. That night we understood the power of being on the right 'team'. We understood the power of standing with authority as an ambassador of something larger than our own power, something truer than our own opinion, something more honorable than what we were up against.



Do You Get It?

When was the last time you found yourself outnumbered by the world around you? When was the last time you found yourself having to defend the honor or truth of what you believe? Did you feel overwhelmed? Did you feel like you were up against the impossible? Have you ever felt like it would just be easier to hide your faith than have to defend it in a secular world that thinks of you as a simpleton? God wants you to stand tall and be his representative in the world. He does not want you to deny Him:



Matthew 10:32-34

"Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."

We are clearly called to be radically different than the people with whom we live and work and play. I work with a man who has been a Christian for many years, but few people on our department even know it. He seldom ever talks about his faith. I tried to encourage him to be a better ambassador for Jesus, and he told me that too many people knew that he was involved in a number of scandalous activities. He was very profane in his language and he was "less than faithful" to his wife. Much of this was well known. So rather than change who he was, he had decided to go underground as a Christian. That's not what God has called us to do.

People often make fun of the fact that I probably have the world's largest collection of Christian T-Shirts. But I truly believe that all of us worship something, whether we believe in God or not. You can always discover what it is that people worship by looking

at their bookshelves, by asking them to name their favorite TV shows, or by looking at the logos on their t-shirts. I don't wear Christian t-shirts to try to force my view on the world, or make a statement or try to be a Christian geek. I wear the logos that demonstrate what I worship. I try to represent my team.



So Answer Me This

When was the last time you were proud to be part of God's Team? When was the last time you stood alongside God and defended His view of the world? When was the last time you simply allowed God's Word to speak for itself and surrendered your life to what it says, even when the world is doing just the opposite?



Moving From Belief THAT to Belief IN

We may believe THAT Jesus has given us the truth, but until we begin to trust that it is true and defend it in our world, we will not have a belief IN the truth of God. And God has already defined what it is to trust and represent Him when dealing with those who don't even believe that he exists:

It starts when you understand Biblical truth (as discovered in His Word)

It continues when you seek confirmation for this truth in the world around you (as discovered through study, prayer and reflection).

It ends when you have fully equipped yourself to defend God's existence and plan for our lives.



The Lesson of the Gun

Without a doubt, the most important (and perhaps the most intimidating) piece of equipment carried by a police officer is his or her handgun. Inherent to this weapon is its ability to protect or end life, and the responsibility it commands is staggering. Before I became a police officer, I always believed THAT this gun would protect me, but once I became an officer I began to put my faith IN the weapon. I served on our SWAT Team for three years and during that time, I had the chance to become part of an entry team, and we served a number of high risk warrants and made entries involving barricaded suspects. There is perhaps no more frightening scenario than entering a residence or business to extract an armed suspect who is hiding from you, waiting to confront you.



As part of our training, most SWAT officers learn the importance of good cover. When working through a house as part of an entry team, we often move from one point of cover to another. But there are often times when cover is limited or non-existent. There are times when you simply have to move into an open area and expose yourself as a target. That's why we work as a team. The first member of the team, leading the way, making decision about our direction, and actively seeking and targeting the suspect, is called the SCOUT. He is so intensely focused on his mission as leader that he runs the risk of being blindsided by suspects that are outside his peripheral vision. That's where the second member of the entry team comes into play. He is called the BACK-UP and it's his job to protect and support the SCOUT, looking for threats that can't be seen by the leader of the team. I was trained in this role because I was slightly taller than the SCOUT on our team and we fit together well. It was during my time as a BACK-UP that I learned what it was to move from faith THAT my gun could protect us to faith IN my gun as a protector.

See, there are times when you are simply going to have to move beyond your available cover (like walls and furniture) and move into a vulnerable area. It's in times like these when you are going to have to use your handgun to secure your safety. It's in times like these when your gun IS your cover. You step out into an open area and you point your gun into the area of the room from which you expect to be attacked. You point your gun where you think the suspect may be. If you see something that is life threatening, you fire FIRST. Your gun becomes your cover because you are safely placed behind it, and it has the power to cover you by becoming a positive force in the gunfight. I learned to move into some pretty scary areas by trusting IN my handgun. It became my cover, as much cover as would be provided by a ten foot tall steel wall. Even in times when it seemed like it was just me and the gun, I had enough faith IN the gun to move with confidence.



Do You Get It?

When was the last time you were afraid to step away from your safety zone? Did you resort to the familiar because you were afraid to take on the spectacular? Did you settle for less because there might be some discomfort involved? Have you ever been afraid to do something for God because you felt ungifted or less than special?

God will not ask you to do something that he has not equipped you to do. Even when you feel less than gifted, know that God has given you enough information to be able to serve Him well:



2 Timothy 3:16-17

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

But you also need to know that God will cover you in a very assertive way. He is your protector, just as he promised the nation of Israel through the prophet Isaiah:



Isaiah 43:2

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you."



Accuracy IS Important

But you've got to trust God to lead you. You've got to trust that He has given you enough information and is powerful enough to protect and provide for your safety if you will only step out from your safety zone and serve Him. As a SWAT officer you are always training to be prepared for situations such as these, and one of the most important areas of training is the area of shot accuracy. I can honestly say that I've never been a better shot than I was in the days that I served on the SWAT Team. I was a great shot! And that's important. I can't tell you how many times I've investigated Officer involved shootings where the officer managed to defend himself and shoot the suspect as part of a running gun battle. The suspect did, in fact suffer a fatal wound, say in the femoral artery of the leg, so from one perspective, you could say that the officer had some success. But this wound was not immediately fatal and the suspect remained mobile long enough to be able to return fire and wound the officer as well.

SWAT officers have learned that it's not enough to hit the suspect with a shot. You've got to be incredibly accurate and hit the suspect with a shot that will immediately STOP him from shooting and killing YOU! That requires accuracy. If you are not accurate, you might as well not even carry a gun! And the same thing is true when we step away from our comfort zone and minister the Word of truth to a lost and dying world. We HAVE to be accurate:



2 Timothy 2:15

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth."

If you have a misconception about what the Bible teaches, you are not working FOR God, you are working AGAINST God! History is replete with movements that have minimized the deity of Jesus, have denied the authority of scripture, or perverted the nature of God. If you're not going to be accurate with the tool you are trusting for your very life, you might as well not have the tool at all. Accuracy MATTERS.



So Answer Me This

When was the last time you took a risk for God? When was the last time you took God's challenge to step out and change the world? Do you even recognize the fact that God has designed His Church to change the world?



"Ekklesia"

The word, "church" appears in the scriptures exactly 75 times, did you know that? They are all in the New Testament, of course, and the original Greek

word translated as “church” is “ekklesia”. Now there is something curious about the word, “ecclesia”. Most of us would think of the word, “church” and think of it as a gathering of believers who come together to worship God. But God has another definition. Take a look at Acts Chapter 19, for example. Paul is in the city of Ephesus, and his preaching has turned many from the worship of the God, Artemis. A man named Demetrius had worked up the crowd due to the fact that craftsman who created Artemis idols were being put out of work. Scripture says that the crowd and the city were filled with confusion and at the point of rioting:



Acts 19:40-41

'For indeed we are in danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today's events, since there is no real cause for it, and in this connection we will be unable to account for this disorderly gathering.' After saying this he dismissed the assembly.

I want you to take a close look at the word used to describe the riotous crowd. Look at the word, “assembly” located at the end of the verse. The Greek word here is, you guessed it, “ekklesia”! See, we are called to be an “ekklesia”; we are called to be God’s Church in a lost and floundering world. But God defines “ekklesia” as a group of people who come together for a specific purpose and cause. This group is active and assertive and motivated! It can be driven by a positive cause or a negative cause. When used to describe the Church, it is clear that God has designed us for a cause and a purpose. He expects us to move, to create change, to represent Him in our world, and to see ourselves as His mobile army!



Moving From Belief THAT to Belief IN

We may believe THAT God exists and has created us for a purpose, but until we trust Him and step out and start to create change in our culture, we will not have a true belief IN God’s purpose for our lives! And God has already defined what it is to trust Him when we step outside our comfort zone to serve Him:

It starts when you understand His mission, (as discovered in His Word)

It continues when you seek your role in God’s commission (as discovered through study, prayer and reflection).

It ends when stop serving your own interests and act as a change agent in your world.



See The Difference Now?

So, are you starting to see the difference between belief THAT and Belief IN? Jesus calls us to ‘believe IN’ him in order to be saved, so this difference seems to be pretty important. ‘Belief THAT’ calls us to get it right in our mind, to understand what is at stake, and to understand what God is all about. But ‘Belief IN’ requires trust and surrender. It requires us to surrender to the truth we first

discover about God. It requires us to live not WITH this truth, but to live FOR this truth. It requires us not to UNDERSTAND our faith, but to EMBRACE our faith. It requires us not to see our lives as a RESPONSIBILITY to be lived, but as a joyous RESPONSE to be celebrated.

Let me finish by sharing my life verse with you. When I first realized the difference between “belief THAT” and “belief IN” I began to feel God’s calling on my life to be His Voice in my little world. I began to realize that to surrender to God, meant to join His team and accept His mission. I began to understand how Paul must have felt when he first heard God’s call on his own life. As a result, I have accepted Paul’s philosophy for living:



Acts 20:24

However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace